

Care after minor sprains, strains or bruises (soft tissue injuries)

Emergency Department

Information for Patients

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What is a soft tissue injury?

Soft tissue injury is the name for different injuries such as sprains, strains or bruises. These injuries can be caused by trauma such as a fall, a twist or blow to your body, or from an overuse injury caused by repetitive activity which is not given enough time to heal.

What is the best way to treat a soft tissue injury?

For the first 2 to 3 days (unless we have said differently) we advise following the 5 steps known as **PRICE**. This will help bring down swelling and support the injury:

- **Protect** - Protect the injury, for example, by using a support if you were given one, or by wearing supportive, well fitting shoes to support your foot or ankle. Stop heavy lifting, sports, or activities that are repetitive, or any exercise or activities that are painful
- **Rest** - Stop heavy lifting, sports, or activities that are repetitive. Avoid long periods of standing if you have a leg injury. You may have been given crutches or a sling to help rest the area. It is important to gently move the area to stop it becoming stiff. It may even help with healing
- **Ice** - Apply an ice pack or a bag of frozen vegetables to the area to help reduce swelling. Wrap the ice in a tea towel, or something similar, to prevent damaging the skin. You can do this for up to 20 minutes every 2 to 3 hours
- **Compression** - We may have put on a compression bandage to help reduce swelling. We recommend taking this bandage off at night and while you have a bath or a shower. You can buy elastic bandages at most pharmacies. Put it on again before you get out of bed in the morning. Mild pressure that is not too uncomfortable or too

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tight, and does not stop blood flow, is ideal. We recommend that you do not use it for more than 3 days. This is because the bandage may limit movement of the joint which should normally be moving more freely after this time

- **Elevation** - Keep your injured body part raised as much as possible, above the level of your heart if possible. This can help reduce swelling and discomfort

Advice to follow

- Soft tissue injuries should settle in 2 to 3 weeks. If the pain has not improved, or the body part is very stiff, or feels like it is giving way please see your GP
- For sprains, avoid strenuous exercise such as running or weight training for up to 8 weeks, as there is risk of further damage.
- Take painkillers regularly, do not let the pain get too bad before taking them. Paracetamol and/or Ibuprofen can be helpful. These can be bought from the pharmacy and instructions on use are on the packet. If you are taking other medicines from your doctor, please talk to a pharmacist before taking any over-the-counter medicines

Do no HARM for 3 days after injury:

- **H**eat may cause increased bleeding and swelling. Heat such as hot baths, showers, heat packs, and saunas should be avoided when inflammation is developing. After about 3 days no further inflammation is likely to develop. Heat can be soothing
- **A**lcohol can increase bleeding and swelling and reduce healing
- **R**unning or strenuous exercise may cause further damage
- **M**assage may increase bleeding and swelling. After 3 days gentle massage may be soothing

Contact details

Minor Injuries Unit, Emergency Department, Leicester Royal Infirmary 0116 258 5727

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